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Iran: UK government must investigate Iranian officials who held Nazanin-Zaghari Ratcliffe hostage

The UK government must investigate Iranian officials who are suspected of responsibility for the crime of hostage-taking against British-Iranian national Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe to force the UK government to settle a decades-old debt, and where sufficient evidence exists, request their extradition in order to prosecute them in fair trials.

In a [detailed analysis](#) issued today, Amnesty International laid out compelling evidence that Iran's detention of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe amounted to an act of hostage-taking, which is a crime under international law and highlighted the plight of other held dual and foreign nationals whose arbitrary detention may amount to hostage-taking.

Amnesty International submitted this evidence last month to the UK Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, which launched its own inquiry into state level hostage situations.

"The Iranian authorities deliberately and shamelessly deprived Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe of her freedom. They used spurious national security charges and sham judicial proceedings against her with the aim of exerting pressure on the UK government to settle its debts," said Diana Eltahawy, Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa at Amnesty International.

"The prevailing climate of impunity in Iran has emboldened the authorities to continue using dual and foreign nationals as political bargaining chips without any fear of consequences. The hostage-taking of Nazanin-Zaghari-Ratcliffe must not go unpunished. We urge the UK government to investigate all Iranian officials who are suspected of responsibility for this crime. Where sufficient evidence exists, the UK must request their extradition and prosecute the officials in line with international fair trial standards."

The urgent need for the international community to accelerate efforts to prevent and prosecute the crime of hostage-taking is further brought into sharp relief by [mounting evidence](#) indicating that Iranian authorities are holding Swedish-Iranian national Ahmadreza Djalali hostage and threatening to execute him to compel third parties to swap him for former Iranian officials convicted and/or on trial abroad.

Another case of likely hostage-taking is that of Anoosheh Ashoori, a 67-year-old retired British-Iranian engineer who had been arbitrarily detained in Iran since 2017. Both Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Anoosheh Ashoori were allowed to leave Iran for the UK on 16 March 2022. Their release came after the UK government paid £393.8 million to settle a decades-long debt dispute with Iran related to an unfulfilled arms deal dating back to the 1970s.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's release immediately after the UK paid its debt was followed by a slew of reports by Iranian state media outlets, stating that she had been released "in exchange" for the payment. These reports mirrored almost identical statements made by the Iranian authorities to Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and her family during her detention. Only two days before her release, officials from the Islamic Revolutionary Guards summoned Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe for interrogation and told her explicitly that she was going to be "swapped for money".

Amnesty International reviewed detailed evidence in the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe before concluding that her unlawful deprivation of liberty amounted to the crime of hostage-taking. The organization interviewed sources close to her, thoroughly examined documents related to the debt dispute between UK and Iran, and analysed not only public statements by Iranian officials, but also comments they made privately to Zaghari-Ratcliffe and her family.

The organization notes that if similar evidence exists in the cases of other detained dual and foreign nationals proving that the Iranian authorities are conditioning their treatment and/or release on acts or omissions by other states, their deprivation of liberty may also amount to the crime of hostage-taking.

In addition to Ahmadreza Djalali, Amnesty International has documented the cases of at least six other dual nationals currently held in Iran and they include Austrian-Iranians Kamran Ghaderi and Massud Mossaheb; German-Iranians Nahid Taghavi and Jamshid Sharmahd; and two British-Iranians: Mehran Raoof and Morad Tahbaz (who is also a US national).

In March 2022, an 82-year-old Australian-Iranian national, Shokrollah Jebeli, died in custody after the authorities deliberately denied him adequate specialized medical care and withheld his medication for his multiple serious health conditions.

In light of ongoing concerns regarding the Iranian authorities' practice of using detained dual and foreign nationals as leverage, Amnesty International urges all states whose nationals are or have been detained at any point in Iran to promptly examine whether the deprivation of liberty amounts to an act of hostage-taking, and if so, take all appropriate measures to secure their release and ensure accountability.

Both Iran and the UK are state parties to International Convention Against the Taking of Hostages, which criminalizes acts of hostage-taking committed by state and non-state actors and obligates states to take action to prevent and punish such acts. The Convention defines the crime of hostage-taking as the seizure or detention of any person accompanied with threats to cause them harm including by killing, injuring or continuing to detain them in order to compel a third party, such as a state, to do or abstain from doing any act as an explicit or implicit condition for the release of the hostage.

On 1 April 2022, the UK Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee announced an inquiry into hostage-taking by states and made a call for submissions of evidence.

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